DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 765 RC 020 564

AUTHOR	Davis, Robin K.; Lombardi, Thomas P.
TITLE	The Quality of Life of Rural High School Special Education Graduates: A Follow-Up Study.
PUB DATE	Mar 96
NOTE	9p.; In: Rural Goals 2000: Building Programs That Work; see RC 020 545.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Graduate Surveys; *High School Graduates; High Schools; *Learning Disabilities; *Mainstreaming; *Mild Mental Retardation; *Quality of Life; *Rural Schools; Special Education; Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS	West Virginia

ABSTRACT

Two years after graduation, a mail survey investigated the quality of life of rural high school graduates who had been placed in special education programs for mild mental retardation or a learning disability. The Quality of Life Questionnaire was completed by 12 such individuals and by 40 graduates who were not mentally retarded or learning disabled and who had received services only in regular education programs. Quality-of-life scores were significantly lower for students who had been in special education programs than for students from general education programs. The major differences between the two groups appeared to be in the areas of general well-being, occupational activity, and leisure and recreational activity. The areas of interpersonal relations and organizational activity showed no significant differences. The graduates of special education placements scored higher than the graduates of regular education placements in the area of altruistic behavior. A second questionnaire determined that within the special education group, those who had received services for a learning disability had significantly higher quality-of-life scores than those who had received services for a mental impairment. (Author/TD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF RURAL HIGH SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION GRADUATES: A FOLLOW-UP STUDY

Davis, Robin K.
Lombardi, Thomas P.
Department of Sp. Ed.
West Virginia University
Morgantown,W.Va.26506

ED 394 765

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the quality of life of high school graduates who had been placed in special education programs for mild mental retardation or a learning disability. The quality of life of these individuals was compared to the quality of life of graduates who were not mentally retarded or learning disabled and had received services only in regular education programs. The Quality of Life Questionnaire was used as the instrument of measurement and mean scores were obtained for each of the above groups. Scores were compared using t-tests and results charted for easy comparison. Quality of life was significantly less for students who had been in special education programs than for students from general programs. The only area where this was reversed was in altruistic behavior.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DIANE MONTGOMERY

(PARENT)

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

RC 020564

Davis, Robin K.
Lombardi, Thomas P.
Department of Sp. Ed.
West Virginia University
Morgantown, W.Va. 26506

THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF RURAL HIGH SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION GRADUATES: A FOLLOW-UP STUDY

In light of many of the recent cut-backs in education and the general lack of morale among educators in respect to those cuts in funding, some teachers are beginning to question the effectiveness of our present special education system--a system that expends considerable amounts of resources on persons with disabilities. The purpose of special education, as stated in Public Law 94-142, is to provide a free and appropriate public education for all exceptional children (Kneedler, Hallahan,& Kauffman, 1984). An overriding goal of special education is to provide supplemental educational services to students with disabilities, either to enable these individuals to return to regular education or to ensure that they have similar skills and knowledge as their peers without handicaps or disabilities. Yet, according to Edgar (1989), no instructional technology, placement,law, research institute, or interagency agreement would ever allow for equal opportunity for learning that would truly make a difference.

The U.S. Department of Education reported in 1985 that over 4 million students with handicaps received special education services supported, at least in part, by federal funds (deBettencourt, Zigmond, & Thornton, 1989).Many of the conditions that our society now faces--lack of health care, dim employment figures, and low family income levels, are exacerbated by mental retardation or learning disabilities. With the almost astronomical amounts of money being expended for special education services, it is important to revisit the question of wether individuals with mental retardation or learning disabilities can achieve a quality of life comparable to individuals without mental retardation or learning disabilities by means of special education. As Schalock, Keith, Hoffman and Karan (1989) have noted the quality of life has become the major issue in the 90s replacing deinstitutionalization, normalization and community adjustments.

Review of Related Literature

In order to determine the effect that mental retardation or a learning disability has on quality of life, it is important to look at follow-up studies that examine postsecondary adult adjustment of individuals with these mild handicaps. Mithaug, Horiuchi, and Fanning (1985) found that graduates with mild mental retardation had lower economic self-sufficiency than graduates without mental retardation. They also stated

that the earnings of individuals with mental retardation were generally below the poverty level. In 1992, Frank, Sitlington, and Carson reported that the majority of graduates with disabilities were employed as laborers or in service occupations with most having earnings at or below the minimum wage level. In a follow-up study of graduates of special education, Edgar, Levine, Levine, and Dubey (1988) recorded some fairly unsettling findings concerning employment and independent living as compared to graduates who were not handicapped. At two years post-graduation, 80% of individuals without handicaps were employed, 42% were earning minimum wage or more, and 52% were living independently. In contrast, only 68% of graduates with mild mental retardation were employed, fewer than 21% were earning minimum wage or more, and only 29% were living independently.

In 1990, Sitlington and Frank conducted a study to determine the overall adjustment of individuals with disabilities one year following graduation in the state of Iowa. In this study,only 3.6%, were judged to be making a successful transition to adult life. In addition, very few of the graduates (6%) indicated that school had helped them to find a job. A sweeping majority (83%) indicated that they relied on a self/family/friends network to find employment.

Three years later, Sitlington and Frank (1993), again looked at these graduates to determine their level of adult adjustment. In this study, it was concluded that only 3.9% met the criteria for success in transition to adult life, the majority of the individuals were still living at home and single, only 30% reported paying all of their living expenses, and the rate of employment was 72%.

Methodology

Participants

For this study, a sample was taken from the total population of graduates from Preston High School, Kingwood, West Virginia two years post-graduation. The graduating class of 1993 consisted of 359 graduates. There were 191 males and 168 females. Almost all of the graduates were Caucasian. A small number of the students (fewer than 30%) had been enrolled in college preparation courses. The remaining 70% had either received vocational training before graduating, had indicated that they would be receiving some sort of vocational training following graduation, were going directly into a job, becoming a homemaker, or going into some branch of the armed services.

Two of the graduates were labelled profoundly retarded and were not considered for either group when the sample was taken. Approximately 2 % of the total population was identified as mildly mentally retarded and approximately 16 % of the population was considered learning disabled.

Of the 359 graduates, a systematic sample of 30% was taken. Therefore, the sample contained a systematically selected total of 108 participants. An additional 25% sample was drawn to account for those who might not respond to the questionnaire.

Setting

The questionnaires were mailed to the participants' homes with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and the procedure for filling out the survey

.

Measurement Instrument

The measurement instrument chosen for this study was the Quality of Life Questionnaire (Evans & Cope, 1989). It assesses independence, productivity, and community adjustment. It is a self-report instrument that includes 15 subscales, a Social-Desirability scale, and a summative scale. The 15 subscales are: Material Well-Being, Physical Well-Being, Personal Growth, Marital Relations, Parent-Child Relations, Extended Family Relations, Extramarital Relations, Altruistic Behavior, Political Behavior, Job Characteristics, Occupational Relations, Job Satisfiers, Creative/Aesthetic Behavior, Sports Activity, and Vacation Behavior. The test consists of 192 true/false items.
Answers are recorded and a raw score between 1 and 192 is obtained. The raw score is then converted to a T-score and a profile is generated. The data type received is interval. The reliability of the Quality of Life Questionnaire ranges between .77 and .89. Information about content, construct, concurrent, and predictive validity are presented. All of these types of validity are supported. No report of the validity and reliability for the subscales is given.

Design

The study used a causal-comparative design. The independent variable was not manipulated. The independent variable was educational placement prior to graduation from high school and the condition of either placement in a special education program for mild mental retardation or a learning disability or placement in a regular education program with no disability was not randomly assigned.

Procedure

The participants for this study were chosen using systematic sampling. A 30% sample was desired, so, using the alphabetical list of 1993 graduates, every third person was chosen. The resulting sample was comprised of 108 participants . An additional 25%, or 90 participants, was drawn to make up for those who might not return the questionnaire. The participants were then sent a cover letter along with the Quality of Life Questionnaire explaining the study and giving directions on how to answer the 192 questions. They were also instructed to answer the question that deals with educational placement prior to graduation. A self-addressed stamped envelope was included to prompt the return of the questionnaire. Anyone who had not responded by March 31, 1995, was "dropped" from the study.

When all of the questionnaires were returned and scored, the participants were divided into 2 groups--those who had received special education services for mild mental retardation or a learning disability and those who had not. The mean score for each of the groups was calculated. A mean score for the participants who had received special education services was then compared to the mean score for the participants who had not received special education services. The t-test was used to make the comparison of the mean scores of the two groups.

Results

The data obtained from the Quality of Life Questionnaire was analyzed using the t-test. This test is appropriate because the data type for the dependent variable was interval and no pre-test was given. Of the 108 questionnaires originally sent, 52 were completed and returned by the participants. Of those 52, 40 were from graduates who had been in regular education placements and 12 were from graduates who had been in special education placements. There was no distinction made by the participants as to whether they had been in special education for a learning disability or for a mental impairment. The mean score for the graduates of regular education placements was 119 and the mean score for the graduates of special education placements was 87. When the t-test was used to compare these two scores, it was found that the mean scores for each of the two groups differed significantly (see Table 1).

Table 1

Mean Scores and t for Graduates From Regular and Special Education Placements

	Regular Education	Special Education	t
Mean	119	87	3.74

$p < .05$

In addition, mean scores were calculated for each of the 15 subscales. Those scores are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Subscale Mean Scores for Graduates From Regular and Special Education Placements

	Regular Education	Special Education
Material Well-Being	9	5
Physical Well-Being	7	6
Personal Growth	8	4
Marital Relations	10	10
Parent-Child Relations	9	9
Extended Family Relations	9	8
Extramarital Relations	9	5
Altruistic Behavior	5	9
Political Behavior	9	5
Job Characteristics	8	4
Occupational Relations	8	5
Job Satisfiers	7	4
Creative-AestheticBehavior	9	6
Sports Activity	7	4
Vacation Behavior	5	3

The major differences between the two groups appears to be in the areas of general well being, occupational activity, and leisure and recreational activity. The areas of interpersonal relations and organizational activity showed no significant differences. One interesting finding was that the graduates of special education placements actually scored higher than the graduates of regular education placements in the area of altruistic

behavior. This seems to indicate that students who had been enrolled in special education programs tend to be more oriented toward helping others, making donations, and joining volunteer organizations. This may be reflective of a sensitivity to curriculum content.

With this one exception it would appear that individuals who were labelled as mildly mentally retarded or learning disabled and subsequently received special education services for their handicapping condition did report a lower quality of life across a broad range of areas following graduation from high school than individuals who were not considered mentally retarded or learning disabled and received regular education services.

Following the initial analysis, a second questionnaire was sent to any of the participants who said they had received special education services in high school. The questionnaire asked just one question, basically if they had received services for a learning disability or a mental impairment. All 12 of the original particpants responded: eight having services for learning disabilities, four for mental impairment. The mean score for the learning disability group was 92 compared to 77 for the group identified as mentally impaired. In comparing the mean subscales, the two groups differed only in two areas. The graduates who had received services for learning disabilities had a lower score in Material Well-Being and a higher score in Personal Growth.

Certainly the 15 point discrepancy between the two groups is significant and consistent with other studies which comparing learning disabled and mentally impaired adults (Parish et al, 1992). However, the scores of graduates who had been in special education for learning disabled are still below that of graduates who had been in general education programs.

Discussion

The results from this study were not only statistically significant, but also practically significant. The graduates who had been labelled as mildly mentally retarded or learning disabled had a mean score of 32 points lower than graduates who were not mentally retarded or learning disabled. Analyasis of the 15 subscale areas may assit in curriculum and individual program development.

Since this study was conducted with the graduating class of only one rural high school, it cannot be generalized to all graduates or other rural areas. However, all states must follow federal guidelines, so the results may be of value when considering the efficacy of special education. In addition,the results are consistent with the findings of other studies mentioned in the literature review.

References

deBettencourt, L., Zigmond, N., & Thornton, H. (1989). Follow-up of postsecondary-age rural learning disabled graduates and dropouts. Exceptional Children, 56, 40-49

Edgar, E. (1989). On achieving a reasonable quality of life for persons with disabilities. A modest proposal for revolution. The Oregon Conference '89. Eugene: University of Oregon. Department of Education.

Edgar, E., Levine, P., Levine, R., & Dubey, M. (1988). Washington State Follow-along studies, 1983-1987: Final Report. Seattle, WA: University of Washington, Child Development and Mental Retardation Center.

Evans, D.R. & Cope, W.E. (1989). Quality of life questionnaire: Test & Manual. North Tonawanda, New York: Multi-Health systems, Inc.

Frank, A., Sitlington, P., & Carson, R. (1992). Adult adjustment among high school graduates with mild disabilities. Exceptional Children, 59, 221-233.

Kneedler, R., Hallahan, D., & Kauffman, J. (1984). Special education for today. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Mithaug, D., Horiuchi, C., & Fanning, P. (1985). A report on the Colorado statewide follow-up survey of special education students. Exceptional Children, 51, 397-404.

Parish, T.P., Penrod, M. & Rupp, M.A. (1992). Discerning the readiness of special education graduates: The Kansas report. Reading Improvement, 29, 155-156.

Schalock, R.L., Keith, K.D., Hoffman, K. & Karen, U.D. (1989). Quality of life: Its measurement and use. Mental Retardation, 23, 25-31.

Sitlington, P., & Frank, A. (1990). Are adolescents with learning disabilities successfully crossing the bridge into adult life? Learning Disabilities Quarterly, 13, 97-111.

Sitlington, P., & Frank, A. (1993). Graduates with mental disabilities: the story three years later. Education and Training in Mental Retardation, 28, 30-37.